HM; performs mutual communication with other teleconference devices TCD through the communication network NT; and can reproduce the image data and audio data (can monitor the images and sound) of the other conference participants HM sent from the other teleconference devices TCD.

2. Structure of teleconference device

Each teleconference device TCD constituting the teleconference system has a structure shown in Fig. 2.

The teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn have the same structure. Fig. 2 shows a detailed example structure of the teleconference device TCD1 as a representative of the plurality of teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn.

The teleconference device TCD1 includes at least a signal processing device SPD1 connected to the communication network NT, for transmitting and receiving signals to and from the other teleconference devices TCD2 to TCDn which constitute the teleconference system and for applying signal processing described later to signals transmitted and received; and monitor devices MD2 to MDn in which the image data and audio data of the conference participants HM2 to HMn transmitted from the other teleconference devices TCD2 to TCDn constituting the teleconference system can be monitored correspondingly to the teleconference devices TCD2 to TCDn.

When the monitor devices MD2 to MDn do not need to be distinguished from each other, they are hereinafter collectively called monitor devices MD.

The users of the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn are fixed to the conference participants HM1 to HMn. The relationships between the monitor devices MD in the teleconference devices and the information of conference participants HM displayed thereon are not fixed but dynamically changed according to seating-order information described later.

For simplicity, until a change of a seating order is described, a description will be given under the assumption that the monitor devices MD1 to MDn correspond to the conference participants HM1 to HMn located in the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn, respectively.

The signal processing device SPD1 of the teleconference device TCD1 includes a network connection terminal TN1 for connecting to the communication network NT; an information transmitting and receiving section TRB1 for transmitting and receiving information to and from the communication network NT; an information manipulation and distribution section PB1 for applying information manipulation and distribution processing described later to signals to be sent to monitor device MD2 to MDn; an attention-degree-information generating section JB1 for generating attention-degree-

information used for dynamically changing a seating order during a conference, as described later; output terminals TO2 to TOn for outputting signals separately to the monitor devices MD2 to MDn; input terminals TI2 to TIn for receiving signals separately from the monitor devices MD2 to MDn; and an input terminal TS for receiving a signal from a switch SW, which generates switch-pressing information described later, used for generating the attention-degree information.

A detailed structure of each of the monitor devices MD2 to MDn will be described later. Each monitor device MD includes, as main components, at least a speaker provided at the front side of the body of the monitor device, and a display section disposed such that its screen G is directed in a predetermined direction (such as a direction towards the participant HM1).

At least one monitor device MD among the monitor devices MD2 to MDn is provided with a microphone for capturing sound around the teleconference device TCD1 and the sound of what the conference participant HM1 says, and a camera (such as a video camera) for capturing an image of the conference participant HM1.

It is preferable that a monitor device provided with a microphone and a camera be disposed at the position of a monitor device (monitor device MDm in the case shown in Fig. 2) which directly faces the conference participant HM1. It